



## Introduction

### Global Competitiveness

Significant structural forces are currently reshaping worldwide political and economic relationships. Washington State is a player in those changes, and is impacted by the changes. The price of gasoline has reached unprecedented levels of more than \$3 per gallon due to a number of changes in supply and demand on an international scale. Global competitiveness is being redefined as the shifting economic trends in China and India unfold. Transportation is inextricably tied to the economic future of the United States, as consumer appetite for global goods and services continues to grow.



### Washington Transportation Commission Vision

Washington's transportation system should serve our citizens' safety and mobility, the state's economic productivity, our communities' livability, and our ecosystem's viability.

These changes continue to impact Washington State in many ways. Washington has two of the largest international trade ports in the United States. The large volume of containers transported through these ports are projected to triple, at a minimum, over the next 20 years. Globalization, competitive industry trends, and new technologies are increasing freight volumes twice as fast as Washington's overall population and traffic growth. Competition for road and rail capacity are undermining our transportation efficiency and affecting our economic viability.

The main line (Class 1) railroads, the BNSF Railway and the Union Pacific, have experienced huge increases in revenues and profits. They have been investing in their systems. Nationwide, railroads are investing more in their infrastructure than ever before. In 2006, they will invest a record \$8.2 billion. Increased demand for rail service is being driven by transpacific trade, demand for coal, truck driver shortages, fuel prices, highway congestion, agricultural trade growth, and the environment.

The railroads' new business model has increased rail rates for the smaller shipper and created efficiencies for certain high volume long-haulers. Not all rail shippers are benefiting from the new model. Capacity constraints and pricing strategies have created problems for many small-volume domestic shippers. They affect short line performance as well.

Rail service and pricing issues, capacity-constrained and higher-cost trucking, environmental issues, and limited state resources have forced the state to examine what its role should be with respect to railroad operations. The Commission has implemented a rail study as the instrument for that review.

### How Well is Washington Coping?

In the last two sessions, the legislature significantly increased the state's resources for addressing transportation needs. Yet nearly \$67 billion more is needed over the next 20 years to meet the foreseeable challenge. Currently the state has approximately \$29 billion in funding available, while nearly \$38 billion in needed investments remain unfunded.

It seems certain that the automobile will always be an important means of transportation. However, to meet the new challenges, the state, counties, cities, and metropolitan planning organizations must foster a shift away from the traditionally heavy reliance on automobile transportation. We cannot build our way out of this mess with more highways. The state needs alternatives. Improved transit systems, including fuel-efficient rapid rail, are a necessity.

The ferry system needs to be recognized as a vital part of the state's transit system. Biking and walking should be regarded as more than recreational pastimes. Bike trails and walking paths need to be designed for safe commuter use. Transportation must be viewed as, and function as, an integrated network with all modes acting as complementary parts of the whole. Integration of the system must include connections between modes that make the use of all alternatives desirable, enjoyable, and dependable.

It is clear that growth in highway capacity in this state cannot catch up to the growth in the rate of travel. Furthermore, each of the various modes of transportation, both public and private, must be interconnected in a system that efficiently optimizes mobility based on existing and forecasted land use patterns and decisions on residential and commercial locations.

Transportation and growth issues are inextricably linked. Indeed, one might argue that expanded transportation by automobile created the need for growth management policies nationwide. Enacted in 1990, Washington's Growth Management Act (GMA) is recognized as one

of the most ambitious statewide growth management laws in the country. Rather than centralize planning and decision-making at the state level, the GMA built on Washington's strong traditions of local government control and regional diversity.

The results have been disappointing in many respects. GMA's regulations have not been accompanied by enough dedicated resources to implement its principles, which has led to mixed success of the program and difficulty at the local level to keep pace with the regulations. Local officials in Washington State now rank their transportation systems as their number one infrastructure challenge. The transportation sector of government throughout the state must continue to work with elements of government and the private sector responsible for implementing growth management strategies. Neither endeavor can achieve success independent of the other.

### Measuring Progress

Getting the highest possible performance from existing transportation investments through operational strategies, from basic maintenance and operations activities to the application of sophisticated technologies, can make the system safer and more efficient for users. Because building more highway lanes to achieve the desired mobility does not appear to be a feasible option, other means must be found.

The Department of Transportation has made nationally recognized improvements in mobility by developing an effective incident response program in congested urban areas. Another important step they are taking is improving available information to drivers by the increased use of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS). Furthermore, the possibility of managing traffic flow through pricing methodologies is currently under review as part of the Transportation Commission's Tolling Study.

Washington State has unique physical characteristics. Protection of its environment is an economic and ecological necessity. The state is a very desirable tourist destination, due to its wide diversity of habitats that support more than 650 native fish and wildlife species. As the population increases and society's footprint expands, added pressure is placed on natural systems that, in many cases, are already heavily stressed.

The population of Washington State is projected to grow from 6 million to 8 million people in the next 20 years. Most of that growth will be concentrated in the Central Puget Sound area. Uncoordinated and unplanned growth poses a threat to the environment, sustainable economic development, and the quality of life in Washington.

▶ **“The Washington Transportation Plan establishes the strategic direction for future transportation investments, shaped by the input from people across the state that use or share the responsibility for delivering the statewide system.”**

Washington Transportation Commission

Many private citizens, elected officials and agency representatives from outside of WSDOT have contributed their perspectives and provided information to create this plan. It integrates transportation planning into the framework of Washington’s growth plan.

The task of drawing conclusions from the synthesized information has been the responsibility of the Transportation Commission. Staff from the Department of Transportation is responsible for updating the WTP.

**The plan recommends that Washington State adopt the following guidelines for future investment action. Listed in priority order they are:**

**Preservation—Invest to preserve and extend prior investments in the transportation systems we have today and the services they provide to people and commerce.**

**Safety—Invest in key safety targets to save lives, reduce injuries, and protect property.**

**Economic Vitality—Invest in ways to improve freight movement and support economic sectors that rely on the transportation system.**

**Mobility—Invest in ways to improve the movement of people and goods to contribute to a strong economy and better quality of life for our citizens.**

**Environmental Quality—Invest in transportation improvements that provide benefits to the environment and to our citizens’ health.**

## Key Findings

### 1. Mobility

The mobility of people and goods is fundamental to the functioning of an economically vibrant, physically healthy, mentally engaged, and politically free people. Within the borders of Washington State, a complex, interrelated network of transportation infrastructure exists that its citizens desire to have preserved and improved to maximize economic potential and provide recreational and social opportunities, while enhancing personal health and safety. Transportation systems that provide acceptable mobility, in a society that is increasing in population, require constant, innovative, and repeated attention to operations, maintenance, and investment.

### 2. Priorities

The amount of additional investment required to meet the state’s objectives exceeds \$37 billion in the next 20 years. Because that entire amount is unlikely to be available at one time, priorities must be established. First, the existing system cannot be allowed to deteriorate. Accordingly, preservation continues to be the first order of business. The safety of the systems must be improved. Improvements are needed to enhance the state’s economic vitality, its general mobility, the health of its citizens, and the environment in which they live, work, and play.

### 3. Innovative Solutions

The state must continue its search for innovative technological, operational, and planning solutions that can help achieve its objectives through lower costs, more targeted revenue generation, and fully supported and enforced strategic planning for the network’s future. Innovation might be found in employing the latest technologies. Innovation should also include facilitating readily available alternative transportation, including bicycles and walking, which conserve energy and contribute to personal health.

